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The Politicization of Maternal Care: The Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912

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Per mia nonna

The Progressive era saw a series of social reforms and mass movements for better living and working conditions. Middle-class women emerged as the "housekeepers" of the public arena. Women like Jane Addams started these trends and acted as benevolent organizers for the immigrant people, who were entering the United States only to find crowded conditions and hostile cities. Strikes over dangerous work environments became pressing concerns. A history of related actions began to develop with the Triangle Fire disaster in New York City, the Lawrence strike in Massachusetts, and then the strikes in the mid-teens in Passaic and Patterson, New Jersey. Historians have begun to make connections between these actions, and some view the incidents with a degree of linear progression.[1]

While much of the reconstruction of these strikes was commenced in the early 1970s, the research done on working-class women within the context of these events did not come into its own until the 1980s. The women's movement in this country reemerged in the 1960s and 1970s with a very middle-class focus. Thus, the history that was first reclaimed centered around the middle-class women of the past. Also, invisibility due to gender and class created dual obstacles in the job of reconstructing the lives of working women. Recent historians of women's labor have come forward with ground breaking work on women within the labor movements and immigrant women's history. My thesis attempts to focus on the intersections of immigration and work, and how the two combine to allow for the politicization of women at a certain time and place in history.

In seeking out political angles of women's culture at any moment in the past, one must confront the danger of projecting the consciousness and

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[1]Goldberg, David, J., A Tale of Three Cities, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

awareness of women's culture today on the women who lived under extremely different conditions and assumptions. In searching for a history, female historians of women's history must guard against creating the empowered past that they want to find. At the same time, it is crucial to recognize the process through which we have arrived at our current attitudes. This issue is sometimes resolved by altering word choice when discussing what might be now termed as "political." Scholarly debates arise as to the proper amount of politicization we can now claim for women who themselves would not have viewed it as such.[2]

In the last decade, the study of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women's history has been focused around issues of community and women's culture as an extension of the family. Judith Smith leads the field in connecting the politics of the home with the networking that occurred specifically in immigrant communities. Following Judith Smith, Ardis Cameron has also done path breaking work on the issues of immigrant networks and the effects they have on the larger community. Cameron's full dissertation on Lawrence, Massachusetts has not been published yet, but an article of her work appears in Ruth Milkman's Women, Work, & Protest. Meredith Tax has also contributed to the study of women in labor with The Rising of Women. While Smith deals primarily with issues of family and community networking, Tax discusses the agenda of women who push into the public sphere. Cameron seems to make the leap from the communal networking to the avenues of protest more explicitly than anyone else at this moment.

I have tried in my paper to follow her lead in offering a view of the Lawrence strike that shows that women did more than land in the public sphere; they discovered an agency for themselves during a time of struggle. I begin in

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[2] Dubois,Ellen et al, "Politics and Culture in Women's History," *Feminist Studies* , Spring 1980.

Chapter 1 with a brief look at Lawrence before 1912, and the patterns of immigration that shaped the city. The chapter outlines the ethnic hostilities, and thus, explains the exclusive, protective nature of the ethnic communities. Chapter 2 tells the story of the strike itself. In this chapter I discuss the strike as historians have recreated it , and as the writers, and Industrial Workers of the World organizers, of the time viewed the activity. Following this, Chapter 3 explores in greater depth the role that women had in insuring the victory of the strikers. This chapter illustrates the methods that women used to assert their autonomy and power, and explores the rationale behind these women's actions. The concluding chapter focuses on the rapid decline of the Industrial Workers of the World in Lawrence and the reasons for the disappearance of women from the public sphere. Many historians have concluded that women simply fell back into their daily routines and forgot their short bout with political life. I try to offer an alternative to this simplistic and frustrating reading. I argue that women maintained within their communities a political nature and thereafter it could be ignited when necessary.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I must thank my friend, advisor, and employer Carol Lasser for supporting, and at times nurturing, me through this project. I would never have survived the year without her personal warmth and intellectual stimulation. I also wish to thank Ken Skulski and the Immigrant City Archives in Lawrence, Massachusetts where I did a crucial part of my research. Another helpful source was the Museum of American Textile History located in North Andover, Massachusetts. The tourguide there was wonderful. Ardis Cameron generously sent me two chapters of her dissertation; these helped to affirm many of my own theories of the strike. Others forces behind this project and my

sanity include Lucia D'Elia, Gary and the Kornblith boys, and Kerry Langan. Thanks also to my friends who read a chapter, lent a computer, or offered consistent moral support in the darkest of times. And finally, thanks to my family whose struggle has resulted in my completion of this project and my college diploma.

Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1911 was a volatile city. A town that began as a vision of industrial utopia, Lawrence declined in the years of mass southeastern European immigration, and suffered, as many mill communities, because of the strife that comes with strict class distinction.

Lawrence was founded in 1845 by four Boston merchants. Two of these, Patrick Jackson and Nathan Appleton, had been the owners of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company in Lowell, Massachusetts and had experience in running a large scale textile mill. They, with the assistance of Charles Storrow and Abbott Lawrence, built the Essex Company on the land along the Merrimack River between Lowell and Haverhill.[1] Originally the settlers were similar to those drawn to the industrial community of Lowell, although more family units came to Lawrence than were ever attracted to Lowell. Many native-born young women from the country came to seek employment. Families came in the hopes of finding work for several members. Lawrence had been founded on notions of morally sound industry and, for the first years, it was regarded as a quaint, busy, and picturesque small city. The boarding houses were full, the mills popped up everywhere, and the owners watched over their employees in true paternalistic fashion. From 1845 until the early 1850s, Lawrence was a charming place to live or visit.

Slightly after the middle of the nineteenth century, Lawrence began to change. The influx of Irish immigrants all around the Boston area brought with it ethnic hostilities, and over-population. The sections of Lawrence where the Irish first settled became quickly crowded and shanties along the river sprang up. The tensions between the native born workers and the Irish immigrants emerged, based on religious difference, temperance disputes, and a certain

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[1] Donald B. Cole, Immigrant City (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963) p.17-18.

amount of elitism on the part of the original population. In 1854 the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Know -Nothing party found vast support among Lawrence voters. The Irish immigrants did not have an easy time, and did not easily forget their struggles when it came their turn to welcome new foreigners.

The end of the Civil War marked the beginning of an increase in immigration. This extension of the first wave of immigration meant Southerners moving north, more northern European nationalities, and also many Canadian citizens moving south in search of work in American mills. The numbers of newcomers were not enough to constitute a wave unto themselves, but were substantial enough to assist in the upward mobility of the Irish. The new ethnic groups took pressure off the previously harassed Irish, and opened the political doors to them. The Irish now outnumbered any other single group of the population, and were able to put their numerical power to political advantage . Donald Cole asserts that, "The immigrant cycle was beginning to operate as new groups appeared at the bottom of the ladder and the Irish began to rise. Better years lay ahead." [2]

Up to 1890 the better years did come. The years were not free of ethnic strife, nor were the conditions in industry what they might have been. Rooms, where the machinery was run without rest, were noisy. Hours were long, and the work was tedious. Aside from the problems inside of the buildings, structural troubles arose in some mills. The worst example of the lack of safety regulations was the crash of the Pemberton mill in 1860. The building was not structurally sound and a collapse of the top floor resulted in the demolition of the entire complex. The crash began just before quitting time and many workers

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[2] Cole, Immigrant City p. 41

were hurt and killed.[3] After the Pemberton mill event, there were no more major disasters and the city began to rebuild its pleasant, yet busy, image.

The second wave of immigration commenced around 1890. The new foreigners consisted primarily of southeastern and eastern European populations. Large numbers of Syrians from the Turkish empire fled their situation, Russian, Polish, Austrian, and Italian peasants also uprooted their lives in the hopes of a better future. Italians came to the eastern shores of the U.S. for work, mostly from southern Italy.

Italians played a special role in the history of Lawrence. The new settlers came from the poorest parts of Italy. The division of Italy between North and South long represented a class divide. The cultural centers, the rich Po valley, and the port of Venice attracted and supported the concentration of wealth in the north. The south of Italy, however, experienced drought, was overpopulated, and historically has been impoverished. The dividing line lies below Rome in the western part of the country, and above the state Abruzzi in the eastern part. Although Abruzzi and Lazio (the state that Rome is in) are technically situated directly beside one another in central Italy, they are, and were, separated by their traditions of economic condition. Rome, because of its historic importance and the location of Vatican City within its boundaries, received the means to maintain a strong economy throughout the turn of the century. Cities and towns in Abruzzi were dependent on the land. The hills and valleys of this area were beautiful, but also in contrast uniquely impoverished.

In the late part of the nineteenth century, the poverty became too much for many of the Abruzzese peasants to bear. They saw the posters advertising wealth for mill work in America as a possible salvation. Young people packed

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[3] Cole, Immigrant City p. 31

up hoping for a better life, hoping to send money home to parents and grandparents. Some whole families exited the countryside, but many more of the travellers were young single people who felt few ties, and realized that they wanted a chance to make it alone. The situation in Abruzzi held true throughout the south. Similar conditions could be found in the states of Calabria, Molese, and Sicilia. The small number of northern Italians who did immigrate, found their transfer much easier. Many of them had industrial experience, and they found jobs as skilled workers in other cities including Passaic, New Jersey.[4]

Most of the wave of eastern European immigrants fit more closely economically to the southern Italian immigrants than to the northern ones. The Russians who arrived were primarily Jewish peasants from the Pale. Some had political sophistication due to their knowledge of, or participation in, the Bund, the Jewish workers union formed in Russia before 1890.[5] Even women were familiar with and had participated in workers' organizations and unions, and therefore, the fear of women being corrupted through the unknown was somewhat alleviated. So, the Russian Jews running from an oppressive land, the Italians running from a fruitless land, and the Polish, Syrian, and Lithuanian peasants running from both oppressive and fruitless lands, had a common denominator in their histories. They were all looking for a better life and America had seemed to offer the opportunity to do it. Unfortunately the bond of poverty and oppression did not connect these groups for their first years in the "new country."

The owners of the mills and the officials of the city successfully ensured constant friction between the different ethnic groups for years after the mass migration. The elected city officials played on the already present tendencies of

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[4] Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities, p. 49
[5] Rose L.Glickman, Russian Factory Women, p.199

immigrants to group together by creating zoning wards.[6] These zones sectioned off specific areas, and named them as voting districts and separate communities. The Irish moved out of their ward when the Italians moved in. The zoning of the city into these wards gave political legitimacy to the cliques of frightened immigrants. They gave definition to territorial rights, and encouraged immigrants to stay within their own homogeneous groups, which was their natural instinct. Integration was not a priority for the city officials. The continuous cross-fire between various minorities made certain that no coalition of newcomers would overthrow the ranks of the native born and Irish in the public arena.

The mill owners did their part in maintaining native-born power by using the age old "divide and conquer" theory in the workplace. As the immigrants arrived, they were hired in the mills and usually put to work next to someone from their own country. This system resulted in different nationally specific groups separated both by task and physical work space. The owners assumed that they could handle the complaints of one nationality at a time, but they, like the elected officials, feared the joining of forces of all the struggling immigrants.[7] As it stood, they could instill hostility within any given group by making the competition fierce to obtain and keep jobs. They also had the power to create strife between different groups by raising or lowering wages for one type of work and not another. Because the finished piece of cloth required the performance of a series of stages, the Polish weavers depended on the Italian spinners, who in turn depended on the Lithuanian combers. If the Lithuanian combers were slow the two other tasks were hindered, and with the premium system that the

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[6] Cole, Immigrant City, p. 50

[7] Discussion at the Museum of American Textile History, North Andover, Massachusetts with tourguide and Lucia Conte D'Elia.

manufacturers imposed, this meant less money for all the workers involved.[8] The premium system also demanded that workers be in constant competition with their co-workers, because the faster one person proved he/she could do the work, the faster the machines would go.

The premium system not only worked to cause tensions between peers, but it also added to the level of difficulty of the labor. This meant longer training hours, more accidents and more illness, which in turn resulted in less money. In order to survive, each family economy had to utilize all of its resources. The vicious cycle ensured that every person eligible had to work, and thus had to join in the constant struggle to stay healthy enough to survive in the potentially denigrating environment.

Unified protest appeared unlikely because of the constant influx of new immigrants between the years 1890 and 1910. Those who would not work under the conditions could be easily replaced by more optimistic and desperate new foreigners. The continuity of the flow also kept wages down. The presence of women in the workforce also kept wages depressed. Factories paid women lower wages under the assumption that the women were not the primary supporters of the family unit. In most cases they were supplementary earners; but when the manufacturers hired more women for their cheap labor, they often decreased their employment of unskilled men who demanded higher wages. With this, dynamics in some families began to change. In one Italian home that participated in a study during the strike, the wife made $6.55 per week while the husband made only $5 per week. This was not typical, but the study showed

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[8] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia; done by Mary-Beth Moylan. Tapes and notes in possession of the interviewer.

that on the eve of 1912 more and more frequently women were becoming the primary wage earners and men were getting only part time work.[9]

The rise in women's employment was most noted in the familial units of Poles and Italians. Very few German, Irish, English, or Syrian women worked outside of the home, or if they did, they did not admit their participation to those who made inquiries. This fact not only gave the mill owners cheaper labor, but also gave them a feeling of security about the potential for strikes. They felt more comfortable with larger numbers of female employees, because the supposed passivity of females, as well as their motherly duties, allowed the owners to feel confident about the women's inability to demand or rebel. Moreover, women apparently worked on behalf of the families in the most desperate of households, and thus, needed to remain in good standing to keep their jobs.

The conditions in the workplace were at best unpleasant and gruesome. The rooms were often damp and overheated. The noise that one spinning machine made was enough to drown out any conversation. In most mills, rooms had twenty-five to one hundred machines. Thus, the deafening noise not only prohibited conversation, but also became a barrier to concentration.[10] The youngsters whose work included refilling the empty bobbins, and those who worked with the weavers had to run underneath the heavy machinery and quickly insert the instruments necessary to keep production going. This work was dangerous because of the potential of catching fingers, hands or hair in the ceaseless machines. The breaks received during the long twelve hour days were few. Lunch was taken machine side, and conversation was possible at

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[9] Charles P. Neill, Report on the Strike of Textile Workers in Lawrence, Mass. in 1912, Senate Document #870,62d Congress, 2d session, p.481 (note: on p.481 three of the women who work make more than their husbands).

[10] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia, and discussion at Museum of American Textile History.

this time. However, because lunch rooms were not provided the interactions with peers at the mill was often limited to the people who sat near one another, and could communicate during the break without moving from their seats. The Arlington mill as late as 1925 still had only one common sink for employees to wash up at after the noon break.[11]

The living conditions in the years prior to the strike were as abominable as the conditions in the workplace. Housing was run-down and crowded. Few families could afford to live without boarders to supplement their income. Those families that were fortunate enough not to be boarders themselves found young single people, married couples, or small young families to share their home and their rent. The Italians in particular found this type of arrangement useful. Because notions of extended family care were traditional in Italy, there was little trouble adjusting to shared family homes. The additional tasks of keeping the boarders fell on the women, and in time became a part of a woman's "normal" duties. A majority of Italian, Lithuanian, and Polish families had boarders, while the German, French, French-Canadian, and English families interviewed for the Senate study had virtually none.[12] Interestingly, the data on Syrian family economy suggests that the Syrian women remained in the home, and that boarders were not taken frequently, a situation apparently in conflict with the economic position of the Syrian family.[13] It is clear that the northern European nationalities fared far better than those from southern Europe.

All however, lived in the congested and unhealthy tenements of Lawrence which were reported to be among the worst in the state. The

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[11] Interview with Lucia D'Elia.

[12] Neill, Report on the Strike, Senate Doc.#870, p.477.

[13] Wages for Syrian men tended to be comparable with those of Polish and Italian men, and yet they claimed in the Senate study to have survived without the assistance of spousal income. The contradiction suggests that Syrian families while facing the reality of poverty attempted to maintain the auspice of living as wealthier northern European immigrants. Either their wives did domestic work, which could be viewed as inside the the home, or they did mill work but did not report it.

southern European immigrants who had come primarily as peasants tied to the land, found themselves not in a quaint mill town but living in apartments with at least seven or eight other people. The tenement houses generally had six apartments which meant that approximately fifty people were sharing a home that was situated on no more than half an acre of land.[14] As one historian has described it,

> Men as well as buildings were packed closer and closer as Lawrence neared the strike of 1912. Almost all of the lots in on the Lawrence blocks had more than 70 per cent of the land covered by buildings, leaving little for anything else. The two on lower Common Street, the heart of the Italian quarter in 1911, were the most congested three acres in the state except for a small part of Boston.[15]

The immigrants faced still other obstacles to comfortable acceptance and survival. Not only were their homes wretched and their workplaces unsanitary but the streets where the younger children tended to roam were also unsafe. Like any city infected with ethnic tension and poverty, the streets of Lawrence were laden with crime.[16] These conditions in which the already oppressed workers were living made some sort of desperate act possible. There was a fierce tension between the drive of desperation and the rules of survival. The strains of the workplace were integrally connected to the strains of the home and the streets, and the eventual move of the workers to rebel against their abuse in the public sphere was related to and increased by their inability to survive decently in the private sphere.

The troubles and the readjustments necessary for all foreigners were overwhelming, and the community did little to welcome the immigrant families. The opposite of welcome and care was the result of the bitterness felt by the settled citizens of Lawrence. An era of xenophobia which had started with the

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[14] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia, and Senate Report #870
[15] Cole, Immigrant City ,p.71-72.
[16] Cole, Immigrant City, p.77.

Irish immigrants was continued and no group avoided the wrath felt towards "the foreigner." The best defense seemed to be to adopt notions of cooperation with the existing structure, and this kind of compliance and work within the system is what the Irish instituted in the early years of southeastern immigration.

The hostility and ethnic strife was often played out through the newspapers. As Donald Cole states, the press was also extremely critical of the newcomers. In particular, newspapers tended to blame the new immigrants for the criminal activity of the entire city.[17] Bias was compounded by the fact that the press was generally native born; but the few of immigrant stock who worked in the press tended to be Irish.

The years leading up to the strike were full of this tension between the newly empowered Irish and the new frustrated and poor southeastern Europeans. The Irish had found a degree of cooperation with the earliest settlers of Lawrence, in part by expressing compliance, submission, and a willingness to do some dirty work. Irish women were heavily reliant on the domestic work that middle-class women wanted, and Irish men were willing to do dangerous work in law enforcement. As their positions within the community rose, the Irish quickly forgot the troubles they had encountered and their own initial inability to fit in with the native-born people. They enjoyed their newfound power and worked the political machine to the distinct disadvantage of their new enemies. They still had to prove themselves to the first immigrants and they understood that only through finding another nationality to act as scapegoat would they move up in the political ranks. The Irish politicians did what they had to do to survive themselves. In their survival, however, they alienated themselves from the new immigrants and added to the bitter,

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[17] Cole, Immigrant City, p.77.

prejudiced flavor of the city that had been hostile to them from the beginning of their own immigration.

By the end of 1911 the build up of years of steady immigration, unsuitable housing conditions, and long hours at low pay finally pushed the workers to action. They had come to this new country for a variety of reasons, some were politically oppressed, others were economically depressed, but all had high hopes for better lives. These hopes were often visible within the boundaries of the family. Parents saw potential for the future in their children. However, familial survival sometimes robbed the children of a future and set them into the paths of their parents working in the textile mills as young as age fourteen (younger if their parents successfully had papers forged).

In 1911, the State of Massachusetts passed a "54-hour law," which went into effect the first week of 1912; it proved a catalyst for protest. This law appeared to be progressive, and even benign, to the middle-class reformers who supported it. It limited the hours of work for women and children to fifty-four per week, stating also that no women or child under age 18 should work more than ten hours a day.[18] But the workers feared that a decrease in hours would mean a decrease in the already meager wages. Their fears ultimately proved correct. Although workers made requests for information about the impact on pay checks of the new law; they were given no written indication that their pay would change.

The owners enjoyed having the cheap labor of women and children, and in order to maintain their balance they shortened hours for everyone. Because women and children had become such a large proportion of the working community in Lawrence, the owners felt they could not keep mills open

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[18] Section 48 and 49 Massachusetts Statute of 1909 chapter 514, amended May 27,1911.

only for the men. Working men consequently also found their hours cut. In the second week of January 1912 the pay envelopes indeed came up short.

The anxiety over decreased pay was summarized in a leaflet later produced by the strike committee;

> TO ALL THE WORKING MEN AND WOMEN OF MASSACHUSETTS AND ELSEWHERE
>
> FELLOW WORKERS: We, textile workers of Lawrence, are on strike. We are striking against unbearable conditions.
> It is not sufficient that our wages are low, but the masters, taking advantage of the 54-hour law that was passed to reduce the admittedly too long working hours of women and children, have cut our pay to an average of 50 cents a week, which to us means 10 loaves of bread.[19]

In the wake of the pay cut the issues were clarified. The strike served as a vehicle of expression for the frustrated masses who had lived in the increasingly volatile city. Lawrence, like many New England cities, had started out as a utopian ideal of a benevolent industrial labor town. It could not sustain that image, and more importantly it could not make that dream a reality. As a result of many conditions specific to Lawrence and some external issues that had little to do with this particular city, Lawrence became the battle ground for one of the largest textile strikes in American history.

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[19] Neill, Report on the Strike,Senate Doc. #870, p.497

> Since the beginning of our modern industrial development there have been many conflicts between capital and labor, and during these conflicts frequently some very arbitrary things have been done, but, so far as I know, there has never occurred in the history of trade disputes in this country any conditions approaching or even approximating the conditions which are alleged to exist at Lawrence, Mass.[1]

On the morning of Friday January 12, 1912, workers spontaneously struck in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Prior to this morning some workers gathered at Ford Hall on January 10 to discuss a potential walk-out if the newly imposed 54 hour law caused pay checks to be reduced; but they devised no official strategy. The *Lawrence Evening Tribune* reported of this gathering on January 11 that an Italian group had met and considered a strike, but the decision about requesting assistance from the Industrial Workers of the World (hereafter referred to as I.W.W.) was not reported. The Lawrence *Sun* also reported a meeting at Ford Hall of 900 Italian men, but the *Eagle Tribune* , the daily edition of the regular evening paper, claimed that the meeting at the same location was attended by Poles and Lithuanians, as well as Italians.

Regardless of the exact ethnic make up of the January 10 meeting, it was at this meeting that a possible walk-out was first discussed. Some Italian members of the numerically small I.W.W had considered inviting Joseph Ettor, an Italian I.W.W. organizer, to assist them should action need to be taken, but reports of this were not released until after the strike was under way. Small scale action was taken the afternoon of January 11 by a few female Polish weavers in the Arlington mill, and simultaneously a few Italian operatives in the Everett mill had stopped their machines. Both of these actions foreshadowed the mass movement that occurred on Friday, but in and of themselves, were

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[1] The Strike at Lawrence, Mass., Hearings Before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives, Document #671, 62d Congress, 2d session (hereafter referred to as House Doc. #671) p.3 statement of William B. Wilson.

unplanned acts. According to the reports, comparatively few people had actively considered striking prior to January 12.

Despite the turn out of at least nine hundred for the January 10 gathering, very few of these people were unionized, and thus they were not in a position to draw outside resources or consultation. This was due to the fact that although membership in the I.W.W. skyrocketed in Lawrence during the strike, the organization had not more than 280 members at the start of the conflict.[2] The vast majority of those 280 were of Franco-Belgian origin.[3] The native-born and other northern European immigrant groups traditionally organized with the American Federation of Labor (A.F. of L.), led by Samuel Gompers. An offshoot of the A.F. of L., the United Textile Workers of America, led by John Golden, had a pre-strike following comparable to that of the I.W.W. in Lawrence. The role that the native-born workers had in the strike was minimal primarily because they were in higher paying jobs and did not have to face the frustrations of extreme poverty when the work week was shortened. Many of these workers attempted to continue working, and those who struck forcefully at first allowed the A.F. of L. to reach a settlement for them before the first month was up.

John Golden attempted to take an early lead in strike organization. Because his skilled craft union had rivaled the I.W.W. prior to the strike, he seemed to have the potential to play a significant role in the organization. However, the exclusive nature of the skilled craft union was not embraced by the hungry and angry workers, and as a result efforts Golden made were not well received by the masses. Golden remained in Lawrence after for a short time after the strike broke out and tried to fight for the organized crafts people,

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[2] House Doc,#671

[3] The press tended to confuse the Franco-Belgians with the French-Canadians because of the similar French influence. However, the Franco-Belgians in Lawrence were french speaking people from Belgium who tended to be highly skilled. French-Canadians were prominent, as well, and were thought to be strike breakers.

but his power among the vast majority of the workers was limited. Seeing himself outdone by the masses of non-unionized immigrants he spent the remainder of the strike acting as a foe to the strike movement.

The meeting at Ford Hall consisted mainly of Italians, and possibly some Poles and Lithuanians, therefore the I.W.W., or other union, members present were few. Had the Franco-Belgian contingent of the I.W.W. been behind the decision to call in an organizer from the national union, it is doubtful that they would have called Ettor. The vote to invite an I.W.W. organizer was, therefore, clearly taken among the few Italian union members who were influenced by one particularly active man, Angelo Rocco.

The ambiguities in the reports about the Ford Hall meeting reflect a general inconsistency in the journalistic efforts of the predominantly native born press in Lawrence at the time of the strike. More often than not, a story surrounding an isolated event had several variations; because of the unconventional structure of the first days, confusion was not uncommon. The press, throughout the strike, took a conservative approach. Until the workers in Lawrence were in the national spotlight, the local press made a concentrated effort to appeal to the people in the community who had power; these were the manufacturers. The reports just before the strike gave hints of unrest among the workers, but did not paint a picture of the pressing anxiety that the new law would precipitate.

The morning of January 12 some workers in the Everett mill decided not to wait any longer.[4] They were unwilling to wait for organization from a union to which most of them did not belong. Several young Italian boys picked up

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[4] William Cahn, Lawrence 1912: The Bread and Roses Strike (formerly Mill Town published 1954; Introd. Paul Cowan New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1980) p.100 *some accounts claim that the action started in the Washington not the Everett mill. Still others insist that polish women in the Arlington mill were the first to strike.

improvised weapons and began stopping machines. Within hours workers from the Arlington, Washington, Prospect, Pacific, and other mills had joined the striking group. What occurred was not a walk-out based on specialization, or craft. It could not even be called a collective uprising in the "industrial unionist" sense. The masses had no ideological commitment to the anarchist philosophy of the I.W.W. nor did they have any sophisticated understanding of labor protest; instead they moved out of frustration that was far more personal and economic than political in nature .[5] The 50 cent a week pay decrease represented the cost of five loaves of bread.[6] Families feared that a loss of this amount could mean the difference between survival and starvation. Most immigrant families were headed by men who made only $6 to$15 a week. Even with the work assistance of all eligible family members, many households had trouble keeping all the members alive. Moreover, Italian born immigrants were making less on average than any other immigrant group.[7]

A new phase of organization began January 14. Joseph Ettor appeared on the scene that day. His speeches and the multi-cultural organizing techniques increased the number of strikers and also gave definition to an event which had been passionate but not grounded in articulated ideology. Following Ettor came his I.W.W. co-workers, Arturo Giovannitti, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and William "Big Bill" Haywood. Haywood did not stay long on this occasion, but went to New York and gave speeches on the conditions he had seen. He kicked off a fund raising campaign, and drew national sympathy for the strike. He returned to Lawrence later, when his services were desperately needed. Giovannitti was a poet and activist, and his writing was extremely

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[5] Neill, Report on the Strike, Senate Doc.#870

[6] The accounts by the strike committee claim the average decrease was 50 cents per week, while the mill owners say it was less than 30. The press for the most part adopted a 32 cent estimate.

[7] Ardis Cameron, "Neighborhoods in Revolt," diss.., Boston College, 1986, p.244, Table 3, figures from a study from 1909.

powerful particularly for the Italian community. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn came to the strike with vast oratorical experience. Although she was only twenty-one years old she had been preaching the socialist ,and then the anarchist cause for five years. Her ability to reach the masses of workers was remarkable and, like Haywood, her role in the strike expanded dramatically as the conflict took shape.

Professional agitators drew on their experience in prior labor disputes as they came into action in Lawrence. The newly arrived agitators scheduled peaceful protest marches, talked of the I.W.W., and formed a general strike committee, as well as smaller branch committees divided by nationality. The general strike committee consisted of fifty-six members, with ten core members who quickly organized a list of demands. At the onset the demands consisted of:

1. Fifteen percent increase in wages on the 54-hour basis.
2. Double pay for overtime work.
3. The abolition of all bonus or premium systems.
4. no discrimination against the strikers for activity during the strike.[8]

The branch committees were particularly successful because they enabled the strikers to base themselves in an ethnic community, while at the same time gaining an understanding of the need for class solidarity. The coalition building that occurred was non-threatening because it did not require conformity as a part of co-operation. The use of separate groups as a means to unity was not one the I.W.W. usually employed. However, the uniqueness of the Lawrence community and its at times hostile diversity forced the organizers to reconsider their idealistic notions of solidarity and to formulate new approaches based on already existing personal bonds.

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[8] Neill, Report on the Strike,Senate Doc. #870, p.36.

Joseph Ettor, himself, acted as the chairman of the ten person core group of strike committee members. The other members were elected from the branch committees. Although Ettor, and the other organizers, focused on promoting peaceful confrontations and demonstrations, not on the spirited damaging of machinery that had taken place in the first few days, the I.W.W. often had difficulty controlling the hot tempers and desperation of the workers. The organization was seen as promoting hostility and aggression but in fact the protest marches were intended to be peaceful symbols of solidarity.[9] When this goal was not met, the blame for the violence fell on the shoulders of the leaders and speakers.

On Monday, January 15, one day after Ettor's arrival one protest march took place. The strikers walked in a circle around the mills so that they could exhibit their numbers and prevent potential scabs from entering the buildings. The mills of Lawrence were situated on the banks of the Merrimack River and the three bridges that laid over this body of water served as a dividing line between Lawrence and South Lawrence. The bridges were a central point in town; because of the importance of the mill district, this whole area has always been the center of town. The march that started on Monday morning was located exactly in this downtown area and the police forces were immediately called to assure that order was maintained. The trouble started when the large group of marchers began to cross the bridges that separate some of the mills from the downtown area in order to surround the mills on the other side. On this freezing day in the middle of January the police forces decided to foil the non-violent march by drenching the strikers with water from the fire hydrants. Conflicts such as this one increased with the continually growing militia units.

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[9] Melvyn Dubofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969) p.242.

Again on January 17 the armed forces attempted to drive back the strikers in order to keep the downtown district clear. This time hosing them down was not enough; companies of militiamen drove the walking strikers away from the mills at bayonet point.[10]

On January 22 the appointed strike committee of ten attempted to persuade William Wood, President of the American Woolen Company, to sympathize with his employees and meet their needs. The American Woolen Company was the largest textile employer in Lawrence, and the Ayer, Prospect, Washington, and Wood mills were all under its control.[11] William Wood had considerable personal power among the other mill owners and his company set the standards in terms of wages and working conditions in Lawrence. On January 19 Wood had submitted an open letter to his employees expressing his surprise at the strike and informing them that there would be no raises in pay because the company couldn't afford it. He cautioned the workers against listening to the "outside agitators" who were strangers to the company, and he placed himself as one of the workers by saying "But you and I, on the other hand, are members of the organization."[12] In the open response to Mr. Wood's familial plea the strike committee wrote;

> You must bear in mind the fact that these men, women, and children have not gone on strike for light or transient causes, but because they could no longer bear up under the burdens laid upon their shoulders.[13]

By mid-January the number of "loyal" company members was on the rapid decline, even among the higher paid skilled workers who had originally withheld their support for the massive movement.[14] These skilled workers

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[10] Meredith Tax, The Rising of Women (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1980) p. 254.
[11] Neill, Report on the Strike,Senate Doc. #870 p.33.
[12] *Lawrence Evening Tribune*, 19 January 1912.
[13] Senate Report, Ibid p.41
[14] Neill, Report on the Strike, Senate Doc. #870 p.33.

began to recognize the futility of trying to maintain their production without the support of the unskilled laborers. After all, without the weavers the highly paid loom fixers had nothing to do, and without the spinners the weavers had no thread to weave. The textile machine only worked with all its parts and this phenomenon which once caused agitation through the premium system now worked as a unifying factor for the strikers. Even though the skilled workers tended to disagree with the strike, their work was worthless without the other parts of the production line.

Governor Eugene Foss of Massachusetts realized by late January that the situation was not going to be resolved easily, and that it only got worse by the day for everyone involved. On January 26 Governor Foss finally called for an investigation of conditions in the mills and in Lawrence in general. His newfound awareness of a problem was not based on the accounts of the strikers about the horrors of their work lives. Instead Foss was driven to call an investigation out of fear of public disorder. In his written proposal, he gave as a reason for his sudden interest that "Not the slightest approach to anarchy can be tolerated in this Commonwealth."[15] The presence and power that the I.W.W. appeared to have in Lawrence began to frighten politicians and mill owners alike. Six days before Governor Foss submitted his proposal for a report, dynamite had been found in three locations in Lawrence. Two of these locations were among strike sympathizers.[16] Immediately the strike committee claimed that the dynamite had been planted to set up the industrial unionists and further the city tensions. Later this claim was proven true and the extent to which the manufacturers would stoop to sway public opinion was evident.

Ironically, while the government officials assumed that the trouble was

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Neill, Report on the Strike, Senate Doc. #870 p.39.

due largely to the radical union's presence, the unionists themselves were not running the strike but only mediating and inspiring the masses. The heart of the protest came from the workers and their families. It was the ethnically distinct soup kitchens, and the mutual aid funds which kept strike operation going. These soup kitchens could be found in every neighborhood, and one Italian identified kitchen fed three hundred people a day.[17]

The strike took a crucial turn on January 29, 1912. On this day Annie LoPizzo, a 34 year old Italian woman, was killed. She was shot in a riot between the police and militia and the strikers. Nineteen witnesses saw her drop after a shot was fired from the gun of Officer Oscar Benoit of the Lawrence Police. Nevertheless, Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti were charged as accessories to her murder, under the same suppositions as were used in the Haymarket Riots in Chicago years earlier.[18] In both instances the accusation of inciting riot was enough to place people behind bars for murder. Another Italian man Joseph Caruso later joined Giovannitti and Ettor in jail. He was charged with committing the actual murderous act after being aroused to riot by the words of Ettor and Giovannitti. In fact, Caruso had not been near the scene of the crime, and although he was a striker, he had not heard Ettor or Giovannitti speak. His wife Rosa was a solid alibi and testified at his trial. Regardless of the lack of evidence, this trumped up charge kept the two strike leaders and the striker in confinement for the rest of the strike.

By February 2, the day Bill Haywood returned, the release of Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti had become the fifth demand in the list originally compiled by the strike committee. This demand was original in that it had

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[17] Neill, Ibid p.68.

[18] This riot took place in Chicago in Haymarket Square in 1886. Inciting to riot was first used as a tool to place rebellion leaders behind bars and have them executed. *A brief description of the Haymarket Affair is located in; Melvyn Dubofsky, Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920 (Arlington Heights,Illinois: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1975).

nothing to do with specific workplace problems. The workers in demanding it acknowledged the political, and social power the mill management obtained. Freeing prisoners should not have been a feasible request to the manufacturers.

Thus, the strike that had started over a reduction in wages due to a reduction in hours came to address a variety of issues surrounding workplace and community. Perhaps the most progressive workplace demand focused on a call for abolition of the premium systems. This demand went beyond immediate financial survival to critique a larger systemic failure. The premium system rewarded employees on the basis of output, not time put in or effort. In order to reap the benefits of the premium system a worker had to run machines at dangerous speeds, stay well for the entire four week rating period, and have the fortune of good back up bobbin help to doff the completed spindles. Even if all these conditions were met, a bonus could be lost if a machine was broken, or not working up to normal production.

The strike also raised community consciousness and mobilized community resources in new ways and introduced new methods of organizing to labor movements in general. Angelo Rocco was a key figure in these innovations. He was the force behind the call to the I.W.W. and his initiative in this act set the pace for the alternative strike format. In his late twenties at the time of the strike, Rocco was a high school student as well as a mill worker, and a member of the I.W.W. Despite his late educational start, he went on to become a lawyer.[19] Rocco felt that the strike could fall prey to falsely benevolent mill owners, and to the internal weakness in the ethnic communities that would allow scabs to break ranks with their fellow workers if experienced

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[19] Interview with Angelo Rocco, Oral History Project, Immigrant City Archives, Lawrence, Massachusetts.

organizers were not present. He hoped that professional organizers could stimulate action and regulate a list of articulate demands. Rocco felt that Italians in the past and in other cities had been falsely stereotyped as strike-breakers, and his purpose was to prove this stereotype wrong by immediately getting the Italian workers to back the organizers.[20] This goal evidently was in mind when he originally asked Joseph Ettor to come instead of any number of other I.W.W. organizers. Ettor was fluent in both Italian and English, which enabled him to speak freely with the hesitant Italian strikers, as well as with the press, employers, and English speaking, native-born workers. However, the lack of reception from native-born workers meant that the main focus for the I.W.W. organizers was the immigrant support. Ettor was able to win this easily by being accepted immediately as an immigrant himself.

An important project of the I.W.W. strike organizers' was the women's meetings. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn led these meetings, often with the assistance of Bill Haywood when he returned. Both Flynn and Haywood saw female support, whether from strikers, wives of strikers, or both, as crucial to the overall success of the strike.[21] Flynn and Haywood had worked prior to this time predominantly with immigrants who were without the franchise. This experience gave them an understanding of how best to utilize disfranchised factions. Women in this strike were in the same category as the men as far as the mainstream political arena was concerned. None could vote and all needed to find a new way of protest. The I.W.W. was ready and practiced for this challenge, and the organization learned how to listen to the inclinations of the workers. Haywood later pointed to the natural fighting instinct of many of the

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[20] Interview with Rocco.
[21] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography (New York: International Publishers, 1955) p.132-3.

Lawrence women. In his autobiography he retold one incident in particular that illustrated women's empowerment during strike time:

> The women strikers were as active and efficient as the men, and fought as well. One cold morning, after the strikers had been drenched on the bridge with the firehose of the mills, the women caught a policeman in the middle of the bridge and stripped off his uniform, pants and all. They were about to throw him in the icy river, when other policemen rushed in and saved him from the chilly ducking.[22]

The Lawrence strike also introduced and developed many methods of labor protest common today. An example is the walking picket line. Formerly strikers undertook stationary picketing, but the presence of the militia, and a city ordinance banning gatherings on private property during the "state of emergency" made the only alternative to march.[23] Strikers formed a human chain and scabs were required to break through the continuously moving line if they wanted to work. Neighbors would shout at neighbors from this line and threats were commonplace even among friends. Both women and men participated in this activity, sometimes with children in their arms or playing nearby.

Another first in the Lawrence strike included a very early form of what might ironically be considered labor for learning. As the city government wanted to swell the ranks of militia men present, a deal was struck with Harvard University in which academic credit was given to any students who agreed to voluntarily patrol the streets of Lawrence. Many young Harvard students took up this offer and, though untrained, went to Lawrence to join and probably elevate the chaos.[24] Opposition to these men and their support of government intervention was headed by Congressman Victor Berger of Wisconsin the only

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[22] William D. Haywood, Bill Haywood's Book (New York: International Publishers, 1929) p.249.
[23] Tax, The Rising of Women, p. 247-8.
[24] Cahn, Lawrence 1912, p.174.

Socialist Congressman at the time. He and a few state senators from Massachusetts condemned the use of the militia to settle labor disputes. Under Berger's influence a U.S. Congressional Hearing on the strike was proposed and occurred. From these hearings came Senate and House documents valuable for inscribing the history of the strike. The Hearing in the House of Representatives took place before the final strike demand had been met, and the Report of the Senate was completed in June of 1912, although the data was collected beginning in March.

Thus, the strike that began on January 12, 1912 was disorganized and relatively out of control. This is not to say that the actions were random. The workers had a sense of purpose and were organized along community lines, although there was not an intra-communal uniformity. Ardis Cameron in her study of the strike in Lawrence makes an important distinction between unruled and unordered forms of protest and action. She claims that while Lawrence was not ruled before the influence of the I.W.W., there was certainly a pre-existing order centered around various relationships within small communities and neighborhoods.[25] When the young immigrant workers decided to stop working on that second Friday of the new year they had no understanding of political means to their end, nor had a potential end been defined. Not having the benefits of historical example, nor of theoretical contemplation, the strikers created a demonstration based primarily on improvisation. They were unskilled, predominantly from Southern Europe, and unlike the mostly skilled immigrants from Northern Europe, they did not have the experience in strike conduct that was exercised in cities like Paterson N.J., whose immigrant make-up was extremely different.[26] The I.W.W. presented a structural explanation to

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[25] Cameron, "Neighborhoods in Revolt," p.255.
[26] Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities, p.26-7.

people who were questioning their feelings of desperation and their own reasons for finding themselves in a situation that was oppressive. While the 25,000-30,000 strikers did not tend to identify with the ideological framework of the I.W.W., parts of the unions call were attractive. The workers could place their own struggles within the context of a larger system of oppression.

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On March 12,1912 the mills granted wages increases and met the initial four demands. The only demand left unsatisfied was that Joseph Ettor, Arturo Giovannitti, and Joseph Caruso had not been released. The strike committee met with all the strikers on the common on March 14, and with shouts of affirmation it was decided that the strike was over. Workers returned to the mills with wage increases across the board and a scale of increases that distributed wages more evenly between different tasks. The months following the general return to work were tumultuous, and order was not restored until the strike leaders and Caruso were found not guilty in late September. The publicity of the strike was slow to vanish, and articles were written in periodicals and newspapers all through the summer months. During the excitement, events had occurred so quickly that many journalists and scholars did not have time to critique the actions as they were happening. Thus the backlog of analysis poured into the late spring and summer months.

Research for the Senate Report, which was done from March to June, also contributed to the continued aura of activity. The Senate Report was presented to the Senate in June of 1912. The House Rules Committee, under the chair of Congressman Robert Henry, had heard the testimonies of the strikers in March while Lawrence was heavily involved in strike activity. Because the strike had been so immense and the ramifications on the national community so pressing, the feeling of accomplishment and pride lingered within

the ethnic communities of Lawrence. It can be said that though the technical completion of the strike occurred in March, the strike mentality did not subside until October.

As the trial of Ettor, Giovannitti, and Caruso neared, tensions again became explosive. The mill owners had made substantial concessions and felt that they had no more responsibilities to the workers at that time. In September, the I.W.W. staged a rally for the support of Ettor, Giovannitti, and Caruso, during which a sign stating "No God! No Master!" was displayed; the already skeptical middle-class population began to fear the rebellious nature of the industrial union. This fear and hostility caused the community and religious leaders to join forces in a counter protest which used the slogan "For God and Country." After all, Lawrence had been built on Christian utopian principles for which the I.W.W. showed no appreciation.

A long foe of the strikers, Father James O'Reilly, was the primary organizer of the"For God and Country" march. His purpose of the march was to mobilize conservative and patriotic support, and hence to drive the I.W.W. out of Lawrence. Father O'Reilly was an extremely powerful Irish Catholic priest who ruled the Catholic community of Lawrence and surrounding areas for more than thirty years. While ethnic immigrants had their own priests, Father O'Reilly had a degree of power which was acknowledged and respected by the other Catholic communities.

The timing of this protest against the protesters coincided with the significant publicity that the trial was getting throughout the nation. The leaders of the opposition to the I.W.W. utilized the fact that the workers were falling slowly back into their daily existences, and attempted to entice support by drawing on religious ideals and patriotism. They assumed that the religious aspect would be particularly relevant for many immigrants who clung to the

traditions of religion tightly when immersed in a new culture. Because the ideological bonds with the I.W.W. were not present for many immigrants, when the march "For God and Country" occurred few people were able to adequately defend the anarchist position, and many could identify with the cause of the religious patriots. This is not to say that all immigrants who had struck with the union capitulated to the pressures of the protest against it. In fact, of the approximately thirty thousand persons who marched in the parade, most were native born and Irish citizens of Lawrence, and many others were business people from surrounding towns including Lowell, Boston,and Andover.[27]

Additional thrust was given to anti-industrial unionist movement by the fact that the I.W.W. had split with Socialist party allies in May. The move of the union to a more anarchical and syndicalist framework alienated more of the foreign workers who did not subscribe to the fundamentals of the union even in a watered down, non-extremist form.[28]

Nevertheless, as the trial began the personal connections to the strike leaders were revived. The press surrounding the men made a commendable effort to win the sympathy of the nation as they had done during the strike itself. The I.W.W. went to all ends to free its members and most of the workers of Lawrence did not forget their gratitude and debt to the organizers. The solidarity that remained in September despite the developments of the spring was remarkable. The Italian contingent of ex-strikers seemed particularly prepared to fight for their own. Ignoring the request of the prisoners, a total of twelve thousand workers, mostly Italian, struck on September 27, 1912.[29] The

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[27] Tax, The Rising of Women, p.273 and Cole, Immigrant City, p.195. *Cole skeptically states that immigrants united around this and forgot I.W.W. ties. However the only groups he shows supporting the movement strongly are Irish and "thoroughly Americanized" French-Canadians.
[28] Dubofsky, Industrialism and the American Worker, p.104-5.
[29] Flynn, The Rebel Girl, p. 148.

leaders had recommended that the workers not strike because, according to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn,

> It was a dangerous gamble they felt, never before attempted in this country as far as we knew---a political general strike with demands directed not to the employer but to the state. They felt the risk of failure was too great on the one hand and the temper of the workers, particularly the Italians, too explosive on the other.[30]

That the workers struck against the advice of their organizers represents the independent momentum behind the mass movement. The strikers were clearly organized on their own and not reliant on orders from the I.W.W. leaders. After the exhibition of protest for Ettor and Giovannitti there was little else that could be done to expedite the end of the trial. The strike came to a halt when the fifth demand was met, and the leaders were freed and departed. The end of the trial brought a calm to Lawrence that allowed some of the pre-strike qualities of the city to reassert themselves. The activism that had been inspired no longer found an outlet.

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Writers at the time of the strike had as diverse opinions as the historians who now debate the facts and the interpretations of them. Ray Stannard Baker, who in 1912 was the journalist assigned to the strike coverage by American Magazine, saw the action as "an incipient revolution". Despite his astute observations of the nature of the strike he seemed to curiously misjudge the ethnic activists, relating that, "of all the people in Lawrence none are so humble as the Italians."[31] Nonetheless, he was a notably progressive journalist and American Magazine tended to offer a smattering of views and topics, and was not opposed to slightly radical politics. Ray Stannard Baker saw that the needs

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[30] Flynn, Ibid.

[31] Ray Stannard Baker, "The Revolutionary Strike,"*American Magazine* , May 1912: 74 p.30c * You have only to be immersed in "traditional Italian culture" for an hour to see that Italians, in general, are far from "humble."

of the workers had become so desperate that the political edge of the strike was inevitable. Other commentaries on the strike pointed to the ways in which the strike exemplified arguments for various political factions. Mary K. O'Sullivan wrote about the way certain groups made restrictionist points, or critiqued capitalism, or denounced the Republican protective tariffs, all finding some aspect of the strike to validate their objective.[32] While some made claims that the uneducated immigrants were being used by political forces, far more journalists on the national level took at least a slightly sympathetic approach to the struggles of the workers. One female reporter was so moved by what she saw in Lawrence that when her editor refused to publish her article because it sympathized too much with the strikers she resigned from her job and went to Lawrence to assist in the strike effort.[33]

The most positive and promotional press coverage was given by Bill Haywood himself. On his short campaign in January, and then after the strike was over, he gave speeches that told of the purposes behind the strike that were not as obvious to the reporting community. In his speech at Cooper Union on May 21, 1912 he claimed,

> there are those of us who know that the foreigners in Lawrence have no vote because they have not been here long enough; and we know that the women couldn't vote, because Massachusetts is not in China; and we know that the children could not vote, that though they were old enough to work, they were not old enough to say under what conditions they should work.[34]

With words like these Haywood spoke about the realities of Lawrence life while simultaneously raising funds for the Ettor and Giovannitti defense fund.

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[32] Mary K. O'Sullivan, "The Labor War in Lawrence" *Survey* 28(6 April 1912)p.72-74.
[33] Flynn, The Rebel Girl, p.130, speaking about Gertrude Marvin. Marvin later got an apology from her editor and her job back.
[34] Speech of William D. Haywood at Cooper Union, N.Y., 21 May 1912, published by the Ettor and Giovannitti Defense Fund.

He was not the only speaker or reporter to use tactics of sympathy to draw money for the strike effort. Many women's columns and magazines ran articles calling for sisterhood and solidarity with the Lawrence women. The final call in these articles, which were directed most frequently at socialist publications, was for financial support.[35]

More recently, historians have called the two month long protest the "Bread and Roses" strike, after the I.W.W. song that Joe Hill wrote about the strike. However, the action was about an inability to achieve what was promised in this rich land, and an inability to provide proper care for a family or an individual. Roses had little to do with the walkout, and the politics of the strike were not inbred in an anarchist, or even socialist tradition, which is what the song implies.

Few disputed at the time of the strike that the primary walk-out was disorganized but purposeful. Later historians have argued whether or not mass movement can exist in an organized fashion. It is somewhat more appealing to look back and claim that spontaneous completely unorganized rebellion took place in Lawrence during the first few days of the strike. However, it is equally remarkable to understand how the thoughts of so many could coincide at a moment to allow for some degree of inexplicable order in the confusion. Historians have just begun to explore the significance of natural communal networking in neighborhoods for giving order to this and other strikes.[36] In this context, women's roles are particularly central. The focus surrounding women was seen as a primary strength in the success of the Lawrence strike.

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[35] "The Women of Lawrence," *Solidarity* , 27 July 1912 (a reprint from Industrial Worker).
[36]See Judith Smith, Family Connections (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985),and Ardis Cameron, "Neighborhoods in Revolt" (soon to be published as a book).

. . . the women have resumed their duty on the picket line and the working together for what they believed was the common good.[1]

The emergence of women as the stronghold of the strike, was exceptional and yet understandable if the background of the strike is analyzed as "from the bottom up." The primary impetus for the movement was intolerable living conditions and an inability for families to survive. Women's participation as striking workers was important, indeed a large part of the membership of the I.W.W. during the strike. But, it was as wives and mothers that their participation was equally as visible. The acknowledged caretakers of the private arena were the mothers and the wives, particularly in poor immigrant homes. Home life for the primarily southern and eastern European immigrants was at the base of all interaction with the world. Family was the solidifier, and when trouble arose in the public domain new foreigners looked back to the home for inner strength and definition. This, at times, made the home a place of retreat, positioned the private sphere on a lower, regressive plateau, but also located the female and the home life as central. This centrality in a moment of panic allowed the women in various communities the power and focus to emerge into the public light; politicizing their concerns.

Women had the experience of running the home economy, and knew the necessity of negotiation for survival. They formed relationships with grocers, and found ways to stretch what little they had. This resourcefulness played itself out during the strike as women learned to use their skills in the public domain. Many women, if they were not presently workers, had worked as children to help support their natal families. Interestingly, the same stigma that was attached to mothers who worked did not apply to daughters. Marriage and

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[1] Mary Heaton Vorse, "The Trouble in Lawrence" *Harpers Weekly* LVI 1912 p.10

motherhood altered a woman's propriety in the workplace. Notions of family economy were ingrained in the women, who did not think in terms of individual benefit . Family financial necessity was the only valid excuse for wives and mothers to be in the mills, or anywhere out of the home. Wages were extremely low for unskilled male workers and necessity did ensure that most women had to contribute to their family's private economy by working in the public sector.

Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century found unsavory the idea of women working for a common family sustenance. But, immigrant workers needed more than one bread winner, even in a time when notions of a "family wage" were seeping into the popular culture. Middle-class women in particular promoted the idea that the male economic contribution to the home should suffice. Women could contribute through their home duties and the pay that the man received from the public sphere would be the compensation for all parts of the household.[2]

Italians, mainly Roman Catholic, had the dual pressure of church and state promoting male control of the workplace and the financial arena of the home. The Italians earned on average less than any other immigrant group and the patriarchy present in their homes was omnipotent. While women did the actual caregiving, bargaining, and bartering, men gave them allotments of money to do it with. The idea of a man handing his pay over to his wife did not emerge in the Italian community until "Americanization" occurred.[3] The finances were controlled by the father, or the eldest son if the father was not

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[2] Majorie Murphy, "Work, Protest, And Culture: New Work on Working Women's History", Review Essay

[3] Ann Ferguson, Blood at the Root (London: Pandora, 1989). Ferguson points to transitions of patriarchy from father patriarchy, to husband patriarchy, to the stage we exist in now public patriarchy. She asserts that immigrants took longer to adjust to husband patriarchy and that industrialization was a catalyst for this transformation. Because Americanization included accepting the industrial necessity of more than one family member working, and renegotiating the husband/wife relation, I consider the change from husband and wife being bound to their natal families, to them being bound to one another as a form of Americanization.

present. Children were usually allowed to keep the change from their pay checks whether it be six or ninety two cents.[4] The South Italian family unit in particular was a collective based on male domination. As one psychologist explained in interpreting the "old country" ways of the Italian family, "The South Italian family is strongly knit and dominated by the father. The father is regarded as the source of authority, even though the mother often may be the actual agent of authority."[5] To maintain this "strongly knit" quality, women in the Italian familial structure were taught from a very young age to sacrifice whatever was necessary for the good of the family. This notion was built on pride and tradition, and when put into practice it meant that a woman was expected to do what was best for the group, even if it required giving up her own agency.

Pride prevented Italian women from doing the domestic work that many other immigrant women sought as an alternative to the mills. Italian men did not want to lose control of their historic position as provider and controller, and they considered it vile to allow their wives and daughters to do the dirty work of someone else. A certain amount of sexual protection was involved within this proud facade. Fear of familial loss of members was associated with possible sexual and platonic interaction with people outside of the Italian community. Hostility to marriage outside of the nationality made it particularly important to prevent women from entering other peoples' homes. Even though domestic work offered slightly better working conditions and often far more constant work, Italian women were never a visible force in the domestic labor market.

Italian men's fear of being deemed incompetent providers carried over into the mills. Prior to and after the strike, Italian women frequently denied their

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[4] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia. Story of how she used to hope to be sick a day because then she got eleven dollars and lots of change instead of thirteen dollars and six cents. These wages were in 1925.

[5] Irvin L. Child, Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943) p.27.

work experience. Unlike Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, and German women they did not readily seek to unionize or to draw attention to their presence as workers. The stigma attached to public sphere work affirmed to the women that work was shameful and only tolerated as the result of financial necessity.[6] The fact that Italian women emerged in the streets as strikers in 1912 points to the desperation felt and the ability this strike had to transform the assumptions of "old country" values, at least for a moment. Although the women were not acknowledged as an integral part of the working class in Italian tradition, the realities of Lawrence forced a redefinition and an admission of their presence in industry.

Faced with double duties of nurturing and working in the mills themselves, immigrant women of all ethnicities suffered immensely but also adopted hidden skills of survival. One of these skills was their ability to use one another as resources. This was vital in their political networking, and made them organizable in a way distinct from middle-class women. The working-class women were accustomed, within their own ethnic communities, to collectively disciplining their children, making soup for one another, and yelling at husbands for their friends and sisters. These common relations of neighbors and friends translated during the strike into communal childcare, soup kitchens, and scab prevention. The issues of middle-class etiquette did not apply within their ethnically based groups. The best example is "scab prevention," in which women would threaten their neighbors whose husbands might have considered going to work. The women would first ask the wives or mothers of the male "scabbers" to try to stop the culprit. If this tactic was unsuccessful, they would then accost the man himself with words, buckets of water, and sometimes hot

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[6] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia.

pepper. Certainly, interactions did not occur free of an unwritten code, but there was a flexible morality based on needs, not cordiality. The informal networking was done primarily by the women in the community. Through inter-community and intra-community connecting, as well as picketing and finding other resources for empowerment, the women of Lawrence actively contributed to the strike.[7]

As Haywood had observed, in the strike of 1912 wives and mothers had for the first time become a central focus of a labor dispute. The conditions under which women and children were working drew the nation into a romanticized benevolence, which was particularly effective in the context of the progressive ideology. Women were also publicized as fighters and aggressors, both for their children and for themselves. Stories spread of the gutsy immigrant women who resisted police officers, sent men running back home if they tried to break the strike, and staged marches on their own through their neighborhoods. The information released through the many reporters who hovered in and around Lawrence during the strike also included depictions of the frail and starving young mothers beaten in by the mills and the difficulties of rearing their children.

If the coverage of the immigrant women was contradictory, it was at least representative of the dual roles that these women had played all their lives. They were expected to be tough and gutsy enough to survive their hardships, but popular culture also encouraged them to adopt roles of dependency on men and roles of motherhood. Suddenly the private sphere was superimposed on the public, and the conflicts of working women's existence were viewed as political.

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[7] Tax, The Rising of Women, p.256.

This superimposition of private onto public might best be called the politicization of maternal care. This politicization occurred on two levels. First, individual women were encouraged to action. They discovered and developed political posture and used their knowledge for public protest. Secondly, the position and concerns of motherhood became the focus of the strike movement, and thus, became politicized on their own grounds. In fact, the strike was about family, especially motherhood and the ability to reproduce and sustain life. This dual politicization of the both women as a group and their role within the larger context, allowed for women to become central to the movement. Women became involved in the public sector to fulfill their private duties, and as a result obtained a political consciousness of their own importance within the labor struggle.

The most active example of the power of the maternal position in the strike was the "exodus of the children". This term was given to the series of departures of groups of children from Lawrence to other cities to remain for the duration of the strike. This one act spurred national sympathy to a level that the manufacturers could no longer ignore. According to some accounts the sympathy and outrage instigated by this action was the catalyst for the general strike victory.

The exodus of the children of Lawrence was an idea inspired by French and Italian tradition and acted on by socialist women's groups mainly in New York City, although other cities followed suit.[8] The French and Italians traditionally had large extended families, and movement of children to other family members homes to be trained or cared for was common. In fact, many Italians came to the United States with their extended family, not their

[8]*Solidarity* 10 February 1912.Credit given to Italian and French traditions of childcare.

immediate one. The idea was embraced by other immigrant women who had in the past used the assistance of friends and family when they could not adequately take care of their children.[9] Because notions of shared childcare were already prevalent among immigrant communities, sending children away was not seen as a breech of maternal responsibility. In fact many women viewed the release of their children as the most responsible and giving action they could take. Both William Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recounted in their memoirs the melancholy of the parents as they missed their children but found happiness in the thoughts of the preferable living conditions the children were experiencing.

The action was dismissed by some outsiders as a publicity scam, and undermined by others as a despicable act of exploitation. John Golden, head of the United Textile Workers of America, showed his dislike for the I.W.W. in general by claiming,

> The Labor Movement of New England and the community in general condemns the taking of the little children from Lawrence by the Industrial Workers of the World as a desperate means of raising funds to further their anarchistic propaganda and to prevent an honorable settlement of the Lawrence Strike by the United Textile Workers of America and the American Federation of Labor.[10]

The few members of his union present in Lawrence resolved their differences with the mill owners and attempted to go back to work. They were rarely successful because under the extreme employee losses most mills shut down completely. Golden spoke at the Congressional Hearing and again expressed his disapproval of both the exodus and the industrial union on a whole.

Despite Golden's assertion that the "community in general" condemned the action, the general public, in fact, viewed the exodus as a unique and

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[9] Tax, The Rising of Women, p.258.

[10] *Lawrence Evening Tribune* 14 February 1912,Statement by John Golden reported by the Strike Committee.

effective representation of the desperation the workers felt. As one high school student in Frederick, Maryland, Clara Donsife, pointed out in her journal, "When the children of the strikers were sent away, a surprise came to the news readers, for that was an entirely new procedure and for that reason created much interest."[11] Clara, at the time a senior in high school, went on to critique that, "The action in future strikes may also be affected by this."[12] She saw this as a political act that would begin a new form of activism. Clara's observations tell us of the general consensus that no matter how sincere the parents were in their quest for better homes for their children, political activism stood behind, or next to the primary care-giving cause. So while the public supported this act of resistance, they did, for the most part, see that there was a dual purpose involved.

The strikers knew this too and their continued support of the exodus was politically self-aware especially after February 17, when Colonel Sweetser of the militia gave notification that he would not allow any more children to be transported.[13] This warning went out again on February 22, when Marshall John Sullivan submitted an open statement on the subject in the local paper.[14]

The accounts of the first days of sending children report that the system ran smoothly. The first group of 119 children left Lawrence in early February. This group was accompanied by Margaret Sanger, then an active socialist, who would later become the most renowned birth control advocate in history. Sanger brought the group to New York City where they were met by thousands of supporters, carried to a hall to be fed, and then placed in adequate homes of

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[11] Writings of Clara Donsife 26 March 1912 Immigrant City Archives Box #1. Clara Donsife's daughter found these writings after her mother's death and sent them to the Immigrant City Archives.
[12] Writings of Clara Donsife.
[13] *Lawrence Evening Tribune* 17 February 1912
[14] *Lawrence Evening Tribune* 22 February 1912

socialist persuasion. In New York, and in most cities where the children were placed, homes were screened by committees of socialist women. These committees formed in response to the strike and as offshoots of the male socialist party groups. The eligibility requirement for families who wanted to take a Lawrence child was stringent. Homes were selected only if the household was well run and if the family could offer both monetary and ideological support to the child. The children were clothed by the "foster" families and given immediate medical attention by a group of doctors, predominantly from the large Italian community in New York, who had volunteered for the task.

Such extensive support sought to redress the difficulties the children arrived with. All of the children were found to be undernourished, most of them showed signs of malnourishment from birth. Of the 119 children only a handful had arrived in New York wearing undergarments.[15] Some observers could not believe that the children, whose parents and siblings clothed the nation with their labor, could not afford the bare necessities of warmth. Other more callous observers theorized that the parents had purposefully sent their children on the journey in the freezing days of February with no undergarments in order to draw more sympathy. This viewpoint was greatly outnumbered by the more trusting and sensitive public. Again however, immigrant mothers were aware that they were arousing public sympathy, and thus, politicizing their actions . Some of the children carried signs which said, " We came from Lawrence to find a Home," and "Some day we shall remember exile."[16] The role of the press and

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[15] House Doc. #671, p.228. Statement of Margaret Sanger.

[16] Joyce Kornbluh, ed., Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology (Chicago: Charles Kerr Publishing Company, 1989) p.183. * Original prints of photos at Immigrant City Archives, Lawrence, Massachusetts.

the attempt to draw public sympathy through the children was central to the House Hearing.

There was little question that the strike was easier for the adults to maintain without the additional responsibility of their dependents. It was also thought the exodus would benefit the children materially. However, during his questioning of Margaret Sanger, Congressman Thomas W. Hardwick from Georgia directly questioned the public relations role;

> Mr. Hardwick. As this is a new departure in American strike warfare I want to see what it means. Was it also the idea that by sending these children to other cities it would excite the sympathy of the people and aid the strikers in their warfare?
> Miss(sic) Sanger. I think it is having a great deal to do with it.
> Mr. Hardwick. I thought you would answer frankly. I am not expressing any opinion one way or the other.[17]

Thomas Hardwick's implication was clearly not a surprise to Margaret Sanger, who saw her role in the childcare as both assisting individuals and politically empowering them. Women found in sending their children that they were helping themselves and inadvertently helping a larger cause as well. Hardwick spoke directly to the political nature of the act by calling this form of childcare, "strike warfare." He acknowledged the power that the mothers had if they used their children as weapons to help win their war. Without passing judgement on this kind of manipulation, he isolated the power and recognized the ways in which typically maternal tasks became part of the politics of labor struggle.

The length of time spent on this significant action was brief. The entire procession of children was halted after only a few weeks had elapsed. Children were sent throughout the first weeks of February to several different cities. A

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[17] House Document #671, p.231.

group of 40 went to Barre, Vermont on February 17. Others went to Boston, and surrounding towns. The program of exportation went smoothly and appeared to be working for everyone until the third week of the month. Parents had received glowing letters from happy children which they shared with one another in their ethnically based branch meetings of the strike committee.[18] Children wrote of new clothes, fine food, and caring families. As far as the children were concerned they were on an exciting vacation.

Unfortunately, the mill owners and the law enforcement officials became increasingly aware of the support and sympathy the children were receiving from other communities, and a decision was made to stop the "exploitation" of the youngsters. The officials assumed that the I.W.W. had planned and processed the exportation, because they saw the covertly political nature of the action. Thus, Colonel Sweetser made a statement which was supported by Mayor Scanlon and Acting City Marshall John Sullivan. Marshall Sullivan was the one to follow out the orders of this statement, and was in charge of the law enforcers throughout the strike.

On Saturday February 24 the height of the conflict over the children occurred. Two days earlier representatives from Philadelphia had arrived to accompany a group of the strikers' children to their city. Upon arrival in Lawrence they learned of the February 20 reiteration by Marshall John Sullivan of the statement made earlier by Colonel Sweetser ordering that no children would leave Lawrence unless the authorities were satisfied with the approval given by the parents. The strike committee had consistently assured that approval was granted by requiring that an identification badge with the parent's signature, or mark, be worn by each child. Equipped with the knowledge that

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[18] Flynn, The Rebel Girl, p.138.

the police and militia were planning to actively deter the children from leaving, mothers accompanied their children to the station on the morning of February 24 in order to give final verbal consent.

Mothers and children arrived early in the morning ready to board the train. Knowing there might be trouble removing the children, the four representatives from Philadelphia purchased tickets for the children only as far as Boston. They intended to then change trains and buy tickets on to Philadelphia. The reasons for this confusing itinerary are unclear, but two possibilities emerged. First as Max Bogatin, one of the two men who came to escort the children, testified to the House of Representatives Committee on Rules that they had been encouraged by the strike committee and the train station officials to take this route possibly because it was less expensive.[19] Despite the effort to maintain calmness and regularity, that morning was packed with armed forces and with crowds; the confusion caused a mix up about tickets among other things. The second, and more likely, interpretation of the purchase of tickets only as far as Boston is that the organizers feared that the police could make more trouble if the children were transported out of the state. Issues of Interstate Commerce were raised at the Congressional Hearings.[20] Whatever the ultimate reason, the Philadelphia socialists and the Lawrence mothers took extra precaution in the ticket purchase and in their continual supervision of the youngsters at the station. The children and their mothers waited for the train under the constant watch of a number of militia men. As it came closer to boarding time, the two women escorts lined the children up in pairs and led them towards the train.

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[19] House Doc. #671, p.187.
[20] House Doc. #671, p.7.

An instant before the first child set foot on the train a police officer stopped the procession. Officers cornered the escorts, began to round up the children and physically intimidated women as they attempted to reach their children. Absolute chaos ensued. Reports of the incident claim that mothers were beaten, children thrown into patrol wagons head first, and that men and women who attempted to assist were held back. Simon Knebel, the other man from Philadelphia, testified that he was immediately arrested and dragged away from the scene so that he could not assist the women, nor could he get a full view of the atrocities.[21] Both of the Philadelphia women, Jane Bock and Tema Camitta, testified that they saw the officers clubbing the immigrant women, but both were held back away from the actual confrontation. When asked if she herself had been injured, Miss Bock replied, "No; outside being handled rather impolitely." She later theorized that, "It was easier to single out strangers. I imagined they were trying to have as little to do with us as possible."[22]

Jane Bock's imagination was probably correct. Lawrence officials did not need any bad publicity about middle-class reformers being beaten by armed officers in the midst of attempting social reform. However, the authorities underestimated the reaction of the public to violence against even lower-class immigrants. The news of this attack spread quickly and broadly. The story was printed in papers all over the country. The public sympathy that the order against the exportation of children was meant to quell exploded with a force that the officials of Lawrence could not have imagined. This single action inspired the Congressional Hearing that brought twelve mill children to Washington, D.C. to testify before the Rules committee, and inspired First Lady Taft to come

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[21] House Doc. #671, p.215.
[22] House Doc.#671, p.193

and hear the stories. Mrs.Taft was so affected by the testimonies she reportedly left the scene in tears.[23]

One story was particularly disturbing. Camella Teoli shocked the public with her tale of suffering in the mill. Camella was fourteen years and eight months old at the time of the strike. She was a striker from the Wood mill, but had previously worked at the Washington mill as well. Camella had started working at the mill when she was thirteen years old, despite a law that prevented persons under fourteen years old from doing industrial work. She told the chairman of the House Committee, Robert L. Henry, how a man had come to her house offering to get her father forged papers from Italy stating that she met the age requirement. After her father gave the man $4, the papers arrived and Camella left school to enter the mill. Two weeks after commencing work, Camella got her hair caught in a machine which ripped her hair out and then preceded to tear her scalp off as well. Camella was out of work for a year, in which time the company paid her doctor's bill but offered no compensation to her family to make up for their lost income. In fact, through the accident the officials discovered her true age and arrested her father for the forged papers. Camella returned to work at a new mill, and went on strike with the masses.[24] Camella's story was one of private horror, yet in this strike became one of public humiliation and disgrace. Social reformers around the country pointed to the cruelties suffered by children like Camella, and her frightening account made people aware of the failure of child labor laws in dealing with the desperate population of poor.

Camella's story also gave credibility to the advocates of sending the children away. She showed that the options in Lawrence even without a strike

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[23] Tax, The Rising of Women, p.262
[24] House Doc. #671, p.169

were few, and it could be assumed that the presence of militia and chaotic rioting would only make things worse. The Congressional Hearing, which was originally called to investigate the incident at the train station on February 24, highlighted many of the young strikers as examples of the dire straits children experienced. The idea of the strike committee was to mesh the testimonies of the youngest strikers with the stories of the attack at the station, thus connecting the difficulties of children in the workplace with the necessity of sending them away. Their strategy worked. The testimonies of the twelve fourteen to sixteen year olds touched the hearts of the American population. The Congressmen who questioned the children were paternalistic, and at times ethnically elite and rude, but nevertheless the tone of the hearing was in opposition to the manufacturers.[25]

One tangential theme of the hearing was the stress of interstate commerce laws in discussion of the train station confrontation. As stated above, the Philadelphia socialists might have bought tickets only as far as Boston in the hopes of avoiding interstate transport regulations, whether real or fictitiously contrived to put a stop to the exodus. However, the interstate commerce laws discussed in Congress were viewed by the members of the committee as potentially beneficial to the strikers cause. The committee on rules opened the hearings with discussion of the rights of people to transport goods across state lines. They discussed the children as commodities whose passage had been paid for. The predominantly native-born, all male committee claimed that the constitution assured that business could be transacted between states and that it was the right of every person to send what was theirs anywhere by train as long as the ticket was purchased. This analysis was probably not conscious,

[25] House Doc. #671

but these men made a critique of children as property that gave the parent, and particularly the mother, the right to use or do with her property as she liked. Their analysis empowered women to ownership and in a way reinforced child rearing as a bargaining chip. A woman who had a child had the right to use that asset to its fullest, even if that meant sending it on a train to barter it for public sympathy. Not all of the members of the committee agreed with this use of children as commerce. Congressman William Wilson from Pennsylvania, a labor advocate and later the first Secretary of Labor[26], proposed this section of the hearing and stated;

> Mr. Wilson. In the first draft of my resolution, before I presented it to the House, I included the charge of interference with interstate commerce; but, after a further examination of it to determine whether or not it should be presented in that form, I concluded that children could not be said to be commerce, and that the transportation of children from one State to another could not be considered as interstate commerce. I concluded that there could be no commerce in children, although there is a possibility that there might be considered to be an improper commerce in children.[27]

Mr. Wilson's moral opposition to considering children commodities was tied to implications that youngsters might become entangled in the white slave trade. But, members of the committee continued to create a definition of commerce that included passengers and used the United States constitution as a reference for this interpretation. The other congressmen including Edward Pou, Augustus Stanley, Philip Campell, and the Chairman Robert Henry, clearly supported the notion that human passengers fell within the same jurisdiction as cargo, where interstate transport laws applied. It was Wilson's persistence that the hearing should take another direction that ended the discussion on children as transportable objects. Although the discussion did end, the fact that it took place represents a framework in which women were able to obtain power

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[26] Edward T. James, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Scribner, 1973).
[27] House Doc. #671, p.5-7.

through unconventional means. It also meant when the law makers could recognize the potential for power through ownership of children, they reinforced the women strikers awareness of the power of their motherhood, if they had not known it already. The hearing, like the strike itself, accentuated the drama of the private lives of women and children, and made these issues the central focus of the political arena.

Nowhere were the issues of the home pushed into the public sphere more than in the media. Lawrence was one of the early examples of the power of the press in swaying popular opinion. Media was extremely important for the strike cause and also in portraying the women of Lawrence as the central concern. The pictures painted of Lawrence in 1912 were bleak and played on the heart strings of any reasonably sympathetic reader. The socialist papers and magazines were obvious organs for arousing strike sympathy and raising relief funds. Many of these journals addressed themselves to socialist intellectuals, particularly women. These women, like their working class counterparts, were seen as the caretakers and the emotionally engaged agents of social change. Because the strike was based on private deprivation and suffering, the progressive women were alerted to their responsibilities of public "housekeeping" and moral uplift of business. *Solidarity*, the I.W.W. paper claimed that, "The situation in Lawrence, Mass. is such that it should appeal to every progressive woman." In this same article entitled "Women of Lawrence" the author also states that "Maternity and its responsibilities are too often weapons in the hands of the exploiting class and a burden on the lives of the mothers."[28] The inversion of this notion is what empowered the women of Lawrence to victory. They took the weapon of the enemy into their own hands

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[28]*Solidarity* 27 July 1912; reprint from *Industrial Worker.*

and learned quickly how to use it. They benefited from the experience of having watched the weapon in action all their lives, and from having acquired the skills to understand their position.

"Women of Lawrence," which was run in several socialist papers, ended with a plea for the two male leaders from the I.W.W. who were being held on murder charges. The tactic used was clearly to pull in sympathy via female and child suffering, and to utilize the emotional response for the good of the whole strike effort. The final call is to women who can afford to assist, and the request is in terms that those women will acknowledge and find appropriate to their own agendas;

> They plead for Ettor and Giovannitti, not as leaders, but as comrades who accorded them the same rights with the men and who looked upon them as co-equals in industry and the management of industrial affairs. They declare that the death of Ettor and Giovannitti would be a blow at practical equal rights, such as has rarely been delivered. They, therefore, call on all progressive women to rally to the aid Of Ettor and Giovannitti, to join in the protest against their attempted electrocution, and to swell the fund for their legal defense.[29]

In fact, most immigrant women were not thinking about equal rights. Their concerns were with feeding their young and surviving themselves. Suffrage was not an issue because the great majority of these women were not naturalized, due to the cost of naturalization and their horrific poverty. Thus, the connection that this fund raising propaganda attempted to play on was unrealistic, yet it shows the mastery used to reach all women with some common plea.

The interconnection attempted across class lines was relatively successful because the organization of the fund raising and publicity was good. Credit for this can be given to the Industrial Workers of the World, particularly Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. These two organizers recognized in

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[29] *Solidarity* 27 July 1912.

the immigrant women the potential for activism. They nurtured this potential, and found ways to motivate women and men outside of Lawrence to assist in the cause. The immigrants had their own ways of interacting, and if any segment of the strike force compromised it was the organizers who realized that they had to work within a slightly different framework in order to make the strike successful. What the organizers did best was to act as liaisons between their socialist and anarchist colleagues, and the relatively ideologically unsophisticated workers. They made each socio-political group respect and learn from the other. The women question was crucial. Not only did the organizers appeal to socialist women for financial assistance, but they also activated them through programs like the children's exodus. This program inspired many women to join socialist women's groups, and it also aided the strikers in inumerable ways.

The convincing appeal for women and children not only went out to benevolent women, but also to men. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn went off from Lawrence on speaking tours to gather support and to spread the word of the conditions. In these speeches she stressed the, "work being done for the benefit of the women and children of Lawrence."[30] Her speeches were attended primarily by I.W.W. members, the vast majority of whom were men. The notion that women and children needed more protection, and that their suffering was far more unjustified than that of their husbands and fathers was widespread and not specific to her ideological persuasion. The I.W.W. played this stereotype to its fullest in order to inspire sympathy. Ironically this empowered the women even more. The organizers realized that they had an extremely militant female force, and that the sympathy these bold women could

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[30] *Solidarity* 9 March 1912.

inspire was great. Flynn, in particular, instilled a sense of rage at the sorrows of the women and children of Lawrence. She,herself, was only 21 years old at the time, and the vision of this young woman standing amidst the crowd speaking of the injustice done to other women and children was apparently enough to inspire paternalistic compassion in even the coldest of men.

The socialists and anarchists were not the only ones to promote the view of women of Lawrence as in need of protection, yet at the same time forceful and political. Mainstream newspapers and journals ran articles and columns about the horrors of Lawrence and the treatment of the mothers and wives. Often these accounts were far more glorified and romanticized that the ones in the socialist journals. Colliers' magazine published a story on Lawrence that dripped of romanticization, and played heavily on the politics of maternal care. In this report , R.W. Child discussed the women collecting before they were attacked. The group was congregating on the steps in front of a church. Child describes the women in a clump all with shawls around their heads. This implies that they were probably Italian women, or possibly of some other south eastern European descent.[31] It is clear from this description that the women were poor and not Franco-Belgian, Canadian, or German. According to the native-born male reporter,

> I saw the night sticks driven hard against the women's ribs. I heard their low cries as they hurried away. I saw one who passed me. "Listen," she called to a friend, "I go home, I nurse the little one. I be back yet." I felt it in my throat. I felt it in my arms. I felt it under the lower eyelids of my eyes. I knew that if that woman had belonged to me, cavalry or no cavalry, I-----

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[31] The Italians were the ethnic group known for the continued usage of shawls, while other ethnic women purchased hats as soon as they could, in order to Americanize themselves. This practice was probably connected with the fact that the Italians were at the very bottom of the pay scale and shawls were cheaper than hats. They were also necessary for covering heads in mass, a tradition that remained required in Catholic churches for women until the latter half of this century.

> There is the terrible thing about a thing like that in Lawrence ----that feeling.[32]

R.W. Child wrote this from his experience observing the brutality in Lawrence. He gave to his reader the sense that not only were women politicized, but also that they were devoted to their activism. Mr. Child viewed the women's mobilization as a particularly despicable indictment on the men who were not taking proper care of them; but he nevertheless acknowledged that the mothers were being beaten, nursing their babies and coming back for more.

In addition to accounts from outside journalists, the strike committee wrote several open letters to officials and mill owners. Circulation of these letters was sometimes national, which was the case in this open letter to Governor Eugene Foss of Massachusetts. The letter, written during the Congressional Hearing period, spoke of how women in Lawrence were beginning to feel more safe now that national attention was being paid to their cause. However, it outlined the attack on fifteen women, who were leaving a women's strike meeting when they were surrounded and beaten by 50 police officers. The account asserted that,

> Not until one of the women, Bertha F. Carosse, 151 Elm Street, was beaten into insensibility did the thugs in uniform desist. The beaten woman was carried unconscious to a hospital and pregnant with new life; this was blown to eternity by the fiendish beating and was born dead, murdered in a mother's womb by the clubs of hired murderers of the law that you have so recklessly overridden and abridged.[33]

The letter tried to persuade the Governor that he himself had a responsibility in the death of this child and that the laws of the state were allowing these batteries to occur. The use of stolen motherhood to represent the ultimate

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[32]*Colliers'* 9 March 1912.
[33]*Solidarity* 16 March 1912.

horror is interesting. The universal injustice of a brutalized fetus had substantial power over the sympathies and consciences of a nation.

Pregnant women had massive power because of their capacity to generate life, and in Lawrence they learned how to use this power to win a strike. As Bill Haywood tells it, the women themselves initiated the exposure of their pregnancy and motherhood to protect their interests. He recounts a meeting of the Polish women strikers in which a young Italian women said to him,

> To-morrow morning man no go on picket line. All man, boy stay home, sleep. Only women, girl on picket line to-morrow morning. Soldier and policeman no beat woman, girl. You see-- turning to her companion, she said, I got big belly, she too got big belly. Policeman no beat us. I want to speak to all woman here.[34]

He claims she then spoke to all the Polish women who agreed that they should picket instead of the men. The power of maternity did not save them from brutality, but it did give them national recognition and support. It was far more powerful in the context of this strike in which the politics of the home were the central focus. The women had validity in the public sphere because they were fighting for their homes.

The physical representation of the public roles of women were underscored when women did strike work while pregnant, nursing or carrying small children. Marshal Sullivan testified at the hearing that the women who led the marches usually carried small children in their arms. To a question asking if he could identify the leaders of the marches Marshall Sullivan stated;

> The women and children were usually in the front rank, but when they came to the scene of action they were brushed aside and the men did the work. The women and children were always in front---mostly women with

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[34] Haywood, Bill Haywood's Book, p.251.

> children in their arms. They were the leaders in the front rank of the procession, and the women carried flags--- American flags.[35]

The symbolism involved in this demonstration was fascinating. The women knew that they were on strike for their children, their vision of family, and the right to survive in a country which proclaimed wealth and comfort for all who toiled.

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[35] House Doc. #671, p.292.

Lawrence was the only real success story that the I.W.W. had to tell, and as a result the city and the industrial union have become synonymous in some labor histories. The Lawrence strike was a major success for the union, but the strikers were not necessarily aware of, or compassionate towards, larger socialist, or syndicalist ideology. Partially for this reason, the I.W.W. was not able to keep its membership up after the strike. Ties to church and underlying desires for patriotism drove some immigrants to denounce the organization which embraced them in a time of need. The I.W.W. as a socialist movement might have remained fortified in this community dominated by Italians, who were well acquainted with socialism from the "old country," and who knew how to separate the pageantry of church from the state. The I.W.W. collapsed in Lawrence not because of fear of socialism, but rather due to fear of something one step further than socialism: syndicalism. The notions of anarchy the I.W.W. began to promote in later years, coupled with the inability of I.W.W. leaders to organize in a conventional and consistent framework, resulted in the loss of thousands of members. The demolition of the unity that won the strike was apparent even before the final demand (the release of Ettor, Giovannitti, and Caruso) was met. The force that Father James O'Reilly stirred was representative of the tumultuous hold the I.W.W. had on the workers. Father O'Reilly's opposition to the strike as a whole was unfortunate, and his personal attack on the I.W.W. was detrimental to the continuation of the union in this city.

At the end of the strike, the I.W.W. claimed a solid membership of 10,000 men and women in Local #20 (many more workers struck with the union than joined after the strike). Within a year and a half that number had diminished to a shocking 700.[1] Women, who at the height of the union in Lawrence had made

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[1] Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, We Were There (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) p.368.

up sixty percent of the membership, vanished from the records.[2] The loss of over nine thousand members, and all of the female members, in this period of time was difficult to justify as a natural post-strike decline. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn attempted to explain the failure on the part of the organizers by saying, "Most of us were wonderful agitators but poor union organizers."[3] Flynn pinpoints one potential reason for the decline, but there must be others. William Haywood, Joseph Ettor, and Flynn herself were "wonderful" at inciting rebellion and motivating masses, but, this movement was not instigated by outside forces. It was an action that exploded out of frustrations that the organizers could not understand. Therefore, to attribute the demise of the political organization to the leaders who admittedly did not control the masses does not serve as an explanation.

In the months directly following the actual strike, women workers continued to receive much publicity and commendation. They had fought bravely and the nation supported their struggle. This sustaining victory also served to rationalize the abnormal circumstances that women had experienced to be temporarily maintained. However, with the reaffirmation of stability in the public sector women were pushed back into their roles as mothers and wives. Their housekeeping duties in the public arena fulfilled, they could no longer claim the agency that they had asserted on behalf of their families. As a contemporary women's historian has noted it seemed that "the women of Lawrence sank back into household obscurity, childbearing, and endless labor in the mills after the strike was over."[4] The disappearance of the women in the public sphere was integrally connected with the decline in the I.W.W.

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[2] Cameron, "Neighborhoods in Revolt."
[3] Flynn, The Rebel Girl, p.150.
[4] Tax, The Rising of Women, p.275.

membership. Their disappearance from the union at the time of its decline was not coincidental. Behind the both the decline and the disappearance were external conditions that affected individuals, and thus familial structures.

One of the most significant external dilemmas that helped to push women back to the home and led men to seek alternative organizing was the economic decline that began rapidly in 1913. As the economy got worse so did the individual lives of many people, primarily of the working class. Mills began laying off workers which meant that fewer women could find jobs to supplement the family economy. Although women were cheaper labor, the progressive reformers' notions of "family wage" became widely accepted, and the replacement of men with women as the primary wage earner was not viewed favorably. While the market was good, and demand was high, women worked along with the men, but when a choice had to be made, women were ushered out of the competition. Employers would hire men when their labor became as cheap as women's. In desperate economic times this was the case. Unemployment figures sky-rocketed until the United States was involved in World War I. The years between 1913 and 1915 were especially difficult. A follow up article on Lawrence, written in 1915, claimed that fifteen thousand textile workers were walking the streets looking for work in the winter of 1914-15.[5] This drop in employment alone suggests that the I.W.W. lost a large proportion of their membership because the members were no longer working and therefore no longer in need of protection and support in the workplace. In addition, most workers were struggling to such an extent that the union dues were not a payment that could be maintained while they were out of work, or

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[5]*Solidarity* 9 January 1915.

experiencing a loss of income because the female workforce participation was declining.

Instead of placing their trust in multi-ethnic, nation wide unions, the immigrant workers once again turned inward to their clubs and mutual aid societies for community networking and protection. These societies allowed for the small incomes that did exist to remain within the ethnic communities and the benefits from these clubs went towards the betterment of specific neighborhoods, not to national endeavors. Immigrant women suffered exclusion from these clubs because business was often mixed with pleasure. The men used the organizations as political gathering places as well as spaces for relaxation and entertainment. Women were convinced that this type of activity was inappropriate for them and were thus once again left out of the networking in the public sphere.

One Italian women recounts that the clubs were viewed by the wives and daughters as "roots of all evil."[6] Men went there to play cards and drink and often returned home drunk or broke. Women were allowed into the clubs once a year for the annual family dinner and this environment became essential for social life between men and women who rarely had an opportunity to share the public domain, for even in the workplace they continued to be segregated. Women, thus, tended to re-adopt some of the pre-strike notions of duty and separateness, as well as to grasp some of the American progressive ideas about women's responsibilities to the moral upkeep of the family. The men's clubs were one way to limit the time in the public domain that women experienced; the prohibition of wives and daughters to unionize was another.

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[6] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia.

Lawrence was affected deeply by the years of press and interest by reformers. Americanization came quickly to the immigrants via the strike effort. They were introduced to more new concepts than they could digest, and it is not surprising that when it was over the male participants felt a need to reassert their authority and position in the family. The structure of "family wage" was a perfect tool. It was based in both patriarchy and reform.

This ideology was one that was attempted and preferred, however, financial necessity often foiled the plan. The years that followed the strike were economically similar, but in many cases worse than, the years preceding and during it for the lower class immigrants. Feeding mouths came before adhering to ideals consistently throughout the early twentieth century. So, while workers tried to remove women once again from the public sector, necessity deemed that they had to work.

The unacceptability of paid labor for women prompted the denial of need for assistance among women. Where once bonds of mutual assistance flourished, in the ten years following the strike an overtly competitive individualism appeared. Women felt the pressure of maintaining an appearance of capability which included first and foremost an ability to take care of children, husband, and home. As Lucia Conte D'Elia recounted, "My mother didn't work after she was married and she never needed neighbors to look after her children. Everyone took care of their own."[7] After further discussion, D'Elia admitted that when Louisa Castricone Conte was ill her female neighbors did the cooking for her family and saw to the upkeep of her children. These actions were reciprocated by Louisa when the situation was reversed.[8] It seems that the facade of independence was more important than

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[7] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia.
[8] Interview with Lucia Conte D'Elia.

the quality itself. Through the small acts of kindness and friendship that women did for one another a mutual dependence was, in fact, fostered and bonds along ethnic lines were sustained. These same bonds, politicized in the strike, had served as ground for networking across ethnic lines and acted as the basis for coalition building. Although the ties were not viewed as political, they did maintain the potential for group activity and kept intact the lines of communication that were so necessary to successful activist organization. The connections after the strike moved back into the exclusivity of the ethnic group, but nevertheless did serve as an expansion of the private sphere for the women. These informal networkings offered women the continued space to interact and engage outside of their own home. The existence of these private bonds upheld the possibility for their politicization again.

The talks between women usually occurred in the kitchens and on the balconies of tenement houses, and sometimes happened at church gatherings. These conversations helped to keep active the political natures of the women which had been nurtured by their role in the strike. In 1919 another strike exploded in Lawrence and the workers took the opportunity to show what they had learned in the former incident. The women of Lawrence expanded their public roles in this time of instability. Although they had been excluded from the "peacetime" political arena, they were again called to action when the community was in need. Where the strike committee in 1912 had featured only one female member, the organizers in 1919 had a handful of females among them.[9] One Italian female worker, Lena Cacici, became extremely active and was not shunned within the community because of her activism. The pride the

[9] Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities, p.103.

community felt for her success and activism is evidence of the changing views towards women in the public sphere, at least during times of emergency.[10]

Perhaps most illustrative of the impact of the politicized women of 1912 had made were the similarities in strike strategy that existed between the two strikes. The 1919 strike was significantly smaller than its predecessor and it was not organized by any national union, however, tactics implemented repeated some of the earlier successful methods. Again the women were used in the front lines of marches, children were brought along with the women to increase sympathy and sometimes to attempt to guard the women from attack. In 1919, another attempt at sending the children to friends outside of Lawrence was made. This time there was no doubt about the dual purposes involved, and the strikers went so far as to make signs for the windows of the cars that the children were to be taken away in stating their destination and their reasons.[11]

A new gesture of empowerment that emerged in 1919 was the refusal by immigrant women to pay their back credit with the local grocers unless they were granted benefits during the strike. This type of bartering and use of consumer power had been used in both the "Kosher" and "Pasta" riots in neighborhoods in New York City when ethnic women had felt their neighborhood businesspeople were taking advantage of their positions and loyalties.[12] The new twist to female demands, as well as the once tried methods of female participation in protest show that although an attempt was made to place women outside of the public sphere, the ingenuities and understandings

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[10] Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities, p. 119. * The fact that Cacici posed a serious threat to a more conservative leader, Joseph Salerno, implies that she had a substantial following in her radical views.

[11] Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities p.112.

[12] Both of these riots occurred in the reform era of the early twentieth century.

that women had gained about their political power in times of struggle remained.

The strike of 1919 ended relatively unsuccessfully. United States involvement in World War I caused a general patriotic uproar. The workers went back to the mills under the pressure of being viewed as unsympathetic to national emergencies. As in any war time, female labor was demanded in much greater quantities and the women of Lawrence were not exceptional in their acquiescent response. The First World War and internationally revolutionary times brought with them fear in the top ranks of United States leadership. The many progressive reforms of the early twentieth century began to be viewed as potentially threatening, and the eruptions of the masses that had occurred in Lawrence and other cities appeared to the high government officials to have deviant undertones.

Fear of foreigners, particularly from European countries where socialism and communism flourished, inspired legislation in 1920 that restricted immigration. This legislative work, termed the Johnson Bill, was not only frustrating for prospective immigrants, but also instilled fear in those who had already settled in the U.S. The next natural step to the "immigrant problem" seemed to some to be deportation of new immigrants who had arrived in the early part of the century.[13] The tenuous existence of immigrants during this period, and the habitual patriotic impulses of war time, help to explain the depletion of strikes and actions during the early 1920s. The foreign-born working contingent was particularly silent in this period and it is clear that fear of conspiratorial assumption was a force behind the silence.

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[13] Interview with Angelo Rocco. In this interview Rocco discusses his feelings that Italians were discriminated against in the 1920 Johnson Bill, blames this discrimination on the Republicans.

The emergence of the Palmer Raids proved that the fear of the workers was not unfounded. It was during this time that many intellectual communists and socialists were arrested without provocation. Admission of membership in the Communist party became a ticket to a jail cell, and anarchy and socialism were feared as allies to mass revolution. Many of the workers who had actively participated in strikes and protests with the I.W.W. and other radical groups denied any connection to the organizations. Women who had thought the safety of private sphere would protect them from the ludicrous stream of arrests and conspiracy trials were mistaken. Women, as well as men, were dragged out of bed in the middle of the night because they were accused of "Red" ties.[14] The Palmer Raids hit the New England mill towns hard, because of the dense foreign population, and the intellectual centers like Boston, New York, New Haven, and Princeton that tended to influence the area.

That innocent men and women were put in prison was gravely unfortunate. However, the muzzle that was put on activist history during this time has had far reaching impact. Many cities, like Lawrence, suffered the disappearance of an active I.W.W., or other radical locals during the repressive early twenties. Immigrants hid their participation from even their friends and children for fear of being turned over to the authorities as communists or anarchists. During these scares, the long developed networks of neighbors that had been so crucial to the strike effort were infested with distrust and connections often broke down. For many of the people of Lawrence, this attitude of silence and fear prevailed throughout their lives. Camella Teoli the girl who had her scalp ripped off and became a national heroine during her testimony in Washington,D.C., lived in Lawrence for the rest of her life. When

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[14] Louis F. Post, The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1923) p.98.

historian Paul Cowan made contact with Camella's daughter in the late nineteen-seventies, shortly after Camella's death, the daughter had no idea of her mother's contribution to the strike of 1912. In fact, Camella Teoli had not told any of her children that she had gone to Washington. They knew she had once worked in the mills but nothing more.

This repression of history about the textile strike is common in Lawrence. Lucia D'Elia, who was only a year old at the time of the 1912 strike, never heard stories of the action until she had grandchildren. Although she was of the generation that most benefited from the reforms the strike had ensured, the gratitude and respect that could have prompted a lasting tradition was stifled before it could start. First out of fear of arrest and harassment, people in Lawrence, particularly women, abandoned their activism and hid their accomplishment. As the years went by, new immigrant groups moved in and the women who had made such waves in 1912 attempted to live by the cultural norms of the native born citizens. In order to elevate their socioeconomic positions they fell into the protocol of the middle-class, which did not include expressing a political consciousness. This is not to say that the consciousness disappeared. It was passed subtly through the informal networks that did survive. The language used did not include the term "political" but some of the conversations that occurred in the kitchens and the balconies still centered around the issues of survival, political concerns, and women's participation. The lessons that had been introduced through the strike of 1912, including ones centering around private lives, the domestic concerns, and female action did not fade away, but rather were pushed out by fears. The immigrant people feared the national unions, the religious people feared the anarchists, the government people feared the potential masses of revolutionary people, everyone became

trapped in fear and this fear resulted in the perpetuation of repressive ideology and women's oppression.

Lawrence today is still a stopping point for the most recent immigrants to America. The mills have mostly shut down but the buildings remain in the center of town. The three bridges which the strikers marched over still stand, and the hostility and frustrations of poverty are still part of the everyday lives of most residents of Lawrence. Now it is people of Latino descent who struggle in the angry environment. The lessons of community building across ethnic lines have long been forgotten and though the ethnic clubs and mutual aid societies have mostly dissolved their presence is felt in the exclusivity of most of the neighborhoods. The history of the strike has only started to be recreated. Until the late seventies the repression was complete. The eighties saw some action being taken by people from both inside and outside the community to recover the history. Articles arise now and then in the Lawrence paper talking about the rich history of the city and sometimes protesting the use of the term "Bread and Roses" for the strike. The voices who assure that their parents and grandparents were not a part of an anarchist "Bread and Roses" strike are strong and the strike is commonly referred to as the "Strike of 1912." Whether or not the participants themselves would have agreed at the time is difficult to determine.

Women in particular were able to mobilize community resources, and to act through pre-existing bonds that were not defined along any specific party lines. Women brought with them, from the countries of origin, tools of bonding that were sharpened in the harsh and isolated first years in a new land. They came with high expectations for themselves and for their children; when those expectations were challenged and survival appeared questionable they rose to action. The women performed double duties in Lawrence, and their experience

in the mills had taught them of their value as laborers as well as mothers. When the work difficulties pushed into the home the logical rebels were the immigrant women.

The strike was a flash of time in which the connections between diverse peoples were strengthened, the power of motherhood and the necessity of familial struggle took precedence, and the private bondings of women were politicized. That Lawrence, the city, could not maintain the revolutionary tradition that it started is unfortunate. However, this does not mean that those of us who now recover its past should not apply the lessons we learn to our own time. Lawrence gives a powerful picture of what can be accomplished through coalition building and through acknowledging the political resources that are often hidden in our private lives.

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